

# The Alexander Thomson Society NEWSLETTER

Nº19, August 1997

## 'The Ingenious Mr Nicholson'

**P**ETER NICHOLSON was one of the leading intellects behind the development of building technology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As well as being a practising architect, he was a first rate, largely self-taught, mathematician and was able through his numerous books on building, carpentry and masonry to impart complex ideas in a relatively simple way to workers and craftsmen.

When he arrived in Glasgow in 1799 it was a very different

**Dr A.L. Macdonald explores the background and achievements of a man whose buildings helped shaped Alexander Thomson's Glasgow – before developing a more personal attachment.**

city from the present day one. The population was about 77,000 in an area of roughly 1,850 acres. The city boundaries stretched from Anderston in the west to Calton and Bridgeton in the east and to just north of Duke Street. There was as yet little development south of the river. By the time he left the city eight years later it had expanded considerably and Nicholson had played no small part in that expansion.

Although born in Preston village in the parish of Prestonkirk, East Lothian, Nicholson spent most of his life in London and the North of England. His move to Glasgow was occasioned by a commission to design and supervise the building of the houses in Carlton Place, Laurieston, part of the prestigious development being undertaken by James Laurie, a wealthy Glasgow merchant who had made his fortune out of the cotton trade. Laurie had envisaged a showpiece development of quality houses and named the streets in hon-



our of the Prince Regent and others of the English aristocracy. However, Nicholson Street was named to honour the architect himself.

This constituted the first major development in Glasgow on the south bank of the Clyde and, since this was Nicholson's first venture into practical architecture, it involved a large vote of confidence in him by Laurie and testified to the reputation he must have enjoyed thanks to his writings on architectural theory and practice.

The previous decade had been a very eventful one for

Nicholson. During this time he had published the first of many books on architecture and carpentry, and had been imprisoned for debt arising out of the loss suffered by one of his publications. He had married, been widowed and left with two young children.

In 1799 he left London for Glasgow by way of Prestonkirk. The Glasgow Post Office Directory has the following entry: 'Nicholson, P. architect, Hunter's close, Saltmarket' [Glasgow P.O. Directory 1799, under, 'Names omitted to be inserted in the alphabetical order'].

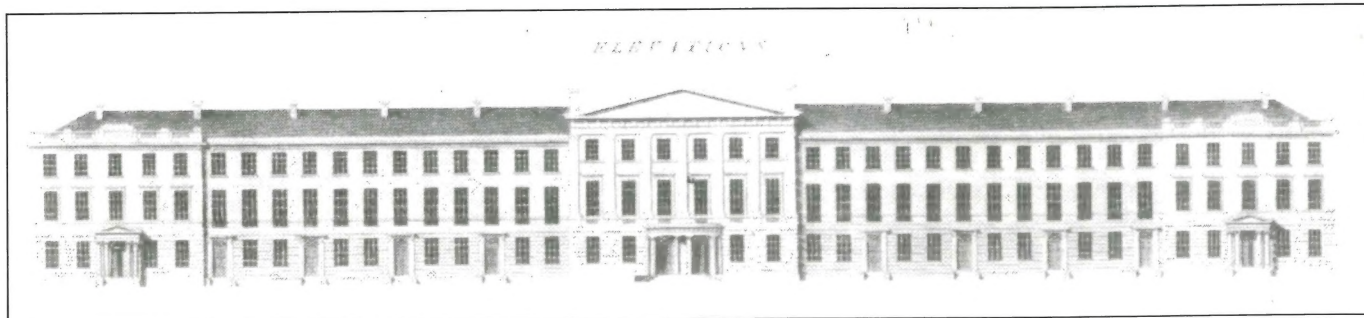
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report  
St Vincent St  
Church Trust  
established  
Fancy a trip  
to Cairness  
in October?**

*Published by*  
The Alexander Thomson  
Society  
1 Moray Place  
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Glasgow G41 2AQ



# Peter Nicholson



By 1801 his address had changed (a characteristic of Nicholson, who led a somewhat nomadic existence). 'Nicholson, Peter, architect, Argyll-street, corner of Jamaica-street' [*Glasgow P.O. Directory* 1801].

The building of Carlton Place (40-61), including its centrepiece Laurieston House (above), began in 1802 and the first part – the eastern section – was completed in 1806. There were several features of the design which showed that "the architect and builder of these houses was a designer of decided originality". Among the novel features of Laurieston House were an unusual roof design, an oval cupola and rotunda with Corinthian columns and coffered ceiling. Some rooms even had a system of suspended floors which could be adjusted for dances, etc. The interior plasterwork was of the highest quality, having been applied by the same Italian craftsmen who were responsible for similar work at Windsor Castle. (This craftsmanship will be fully revealed once more when the building is fully restored under the auspices of the Strathclyde Preservation Trust).

'Carlton Place is composed of houses of the first rank, in point of architectural beauty. The street lies

exactly parallel to the river, upon a terrace raised to such a height, that no flood can completely inundate it'. (Denholm).

So highly regarded was Laurieston House that it was selected as the accommodation for George IV on his planned visit to the City in 1822. Unfortunately, the King's visit did not materialise.

In 1802 Nicholson was instrumental in the founding of the (Royal) Philosophical Society of Glasgow. He was one of the leading proposers and supporters of the idea. The following circular letter was sent out on 5th November, 1802

'Sir

A number of gentlemen thinking that it would be of general advantage were a Society established here for the discussion of subjects connected solely with the Arts and Sciences, propose the following as an outline of the plan:- that the Society shall meet once a week during winter, and once a fortnight during the remainder of the year, in some convenient place, for the purpose of exhibiting models of machinery, and of conversing together on any improvements that may have taken place, or may be proposed, in the

Arts and Sciences, and where those who choose may have the opportunity of reading Essays on these subjects. Should the above scheme receive your approbation, your presence in the Prince of Wales Tavern on Tuesday first, the 9th instant, at seven o'clock in the evening, to constitute the Society, and to appoint a preses and managers, is requested by the Committee nominated to carry the plan into effect.'

Glas. 5 Novemr 1802

(signed)

John Robertson

Wm. Douglas

Peter Nicholson

At the subsequent meeting of 8th December, Nicholson was elected as one of the Directors of the Society (annual subscription 6 guineas), and seems to have been an active participant in its affairs. On the 2nd of February 1803 he read an 'Essay on Roofing' before the Society and 'in illustration thereof exhibited two models of Roofs'. (These may have been models of his designs for the roofs in Carlton Place.) The minutes state that 'With these the meeting were highly gratified, and requested Mr. Nicholson to permit the Essay to be inserted in the Records of the Society'.

On 30th March of the same year he 'exhibited a model of a wooden Bridge capable of supporting a considerable weight, and of a very ingenious construction. He also explained the principles on which it was formed. The meeting were much pleased with the model, and highly approved of it'. Denholm, who was elected a member of the Society the same evening, notes in his Glasgow that 'It is intended... to erect a bridge of cast iron, 10 feet broad within the railing, for foot passengers, from a most ingenious design, drawn by Mr. P. Nicholson, architect'. In the event, expense probably precluded the building of an iron bridge. However, a wooden bridge to Nicholson's design was erected.

'The Wooden Bridge was built in 1803, after a design by Mr. Peter Nicholson, at the expense of £1200, and maintains communication between the foot of Saltmarket-street and Hutchesontown. It is formed by one arch, 340 ft in span, with eight supports and breakwaters'. [Chapman's *Picture of Glasgow*]

The bridge was free for weekday users but cost one penny to cross on Sunday. Nicholson was obviously

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## CASES

### The St Vincent Street Church

Encouraging progress is now being made. The Alexander 'Greek' Thomson Trust (as one being more immediately recognisable to the wider public) has now been legally established, with Lord Prosser as honorary president and Patricia Chalmers as convener.

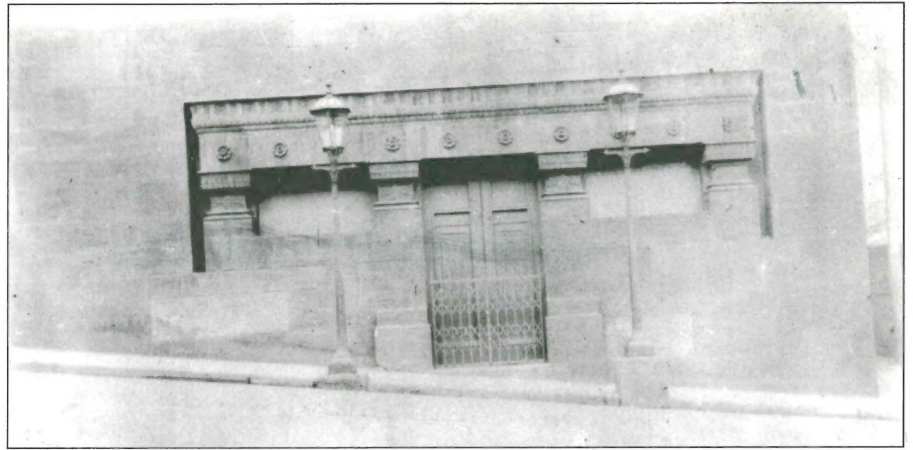
The objectives of the trust are, to quote from the leaflet issued to invite proposals for restoration and refurbishment, – [quote from last page of leaflet]

Meanwhile, the New York-based World Monuments Fund – which has done much to help St George's Hall in Liverpool – has placed the church on the World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites. And in September, during the annual conference of the American Society of Travel Agents being held in Glasgow, a donation towards the restoration of the church will be made by American Express to inaugurate a campaign of fund raising. All of which goes to confirm that not only is Thomson's only surviving intact church a building of world importance but its restoration is a matter of international concern.

### The Caledonia Road Church

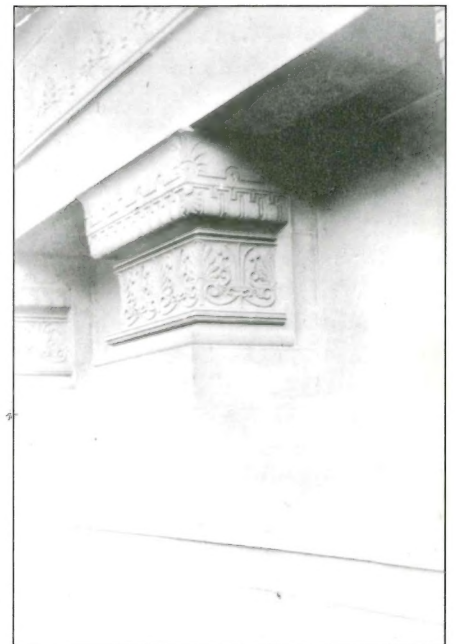
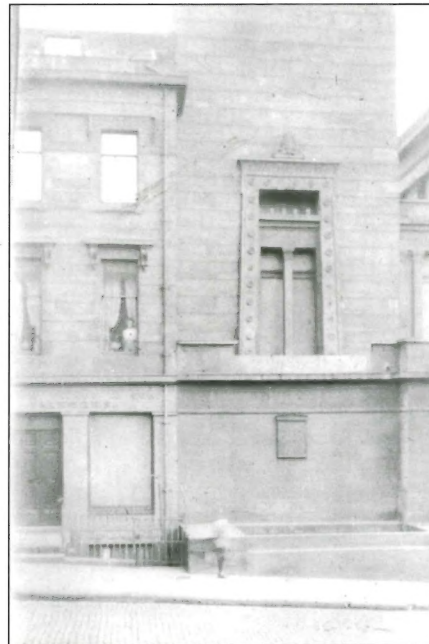
We have been invited to join a Steering Group set up by Glasgow City Council to consider the future of the ruin of the Caledonia Road Church. And we are pleased to find that, in the draft Development Brief/Design Guide prepared by the Planning Department, the desirability of the proposal made by Alan McCartney and the Historic Buildings Trust – to shift the major north-south road to the WEST of the church – has been accepted. We have always argued that it is essential to integrate the church with the future development of Crown Street to the east if the restored building is to have a viable future. We are therefore puzzled by the opposition of the director of the Crown Street Regeneration Project to this idea.

New roads have already done immense damage to this area – as elsewhere – and it is surely essential for the future of this great monument, and for the Gorbals, that the Roads Department does not con-



## St Vincent Street Church photographs

We reproduce some undated and very faded photographs of the St Vincent Street Church, kindly presented to the society by Argyll & Bute Council. They are of some interest: one shows the junction between the church and the adjacent tenement block by Thomson which was demolished in 1967, while the two of the Pitt Street entrance show both the lamp posts which once flanked the door and confirm that the windows – so stupidly and crudely filled in in the late 1960s – consisted of single sheets of glass running directly into the masonry, as might be expected.



tinue to dictate policy in antediluvian Glasgow.

### Gleneden, Bothwell

The society objected to the proposal to erect two houses in the grounds of this 'A' listed villa, and is pleased to learn that planning permission and listed building consent has been refused by South Lanarkshire Council.

### Egyptian Halls

Following the successful compulsory purchase of the upper floors of Thomson's finest commercial building by the Council, proposals for its rehabilitation by the owners of the ground floor

shops are advancing. Unfortunately, a hiatus occurred earlier this year when it emerged that while the Glasgow Development Agency was not prepared to assist the project if the stonework was left dirty, Historic Scotland declined to grant aid if it was to be cleaned. Impasse resulted.

This society readily recognises that far too much destructive stone-cleaning has been carried out in Glasgow with disastrous long-term consequences, and that it is often best not to clean. In this case however, as much indentation of new stone is required, cleaning seemed a rea-

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# Peter Nicholson

pleased with the general reception for his design. He noted in his *Architectural Dictionary* 'Both Mr. Rennie and Mr. Telford, the most eminent engineers in the Country, have given their approbation of its construction with regard to the intention, its simplicity and strength'.

In 1821, a crowd, protesting at the treatment of Queen Caroline by King George IV, rioted and rushed over the bridge. The *Glasgow Courier* of 24th April 1821 records that 'The area in front of the Court-Houses being cleared, many of the people retired further up the Green or onto the adjoining streets, but a greater number pressed themselves upon the Wooden Bridge leading to Hutchesontown, which, in consequence of the Great weight, unfortunately gave way at the North End and precipitated a considerable number of people in to the channel of the river which



however is then exceedingly shallow or dry'.

The bridge lasted until 1829 when it was taken down and replaced by one designed by Robert Stephenson, grandfather of R.L. Stephenson.

Nicholson, Peter, architect,  
59, Queen-street' [*Glasgow*  
*P.O. Directory*, 1803].

Another of Nicholson's buildings in Glasgow was Yorkhill House, built in 1805 near Partick for a wealthy Glasgow merchant, Robert

Above: A print showing Nicholson's Bridge (Original in Glasgow Museums Collection 'Glasgow Bridges and Merchants Tower' by J. Brooks, 1806)

Below: Yorkhill House, "Executed at Partick near Glasgow in 1806 for Fulton Alexander Esq." (Nicholson's *Architectural Dictionary*). Nicholson notes that "the plate shews the original design which only differs from that which was executed in having a circular turret in the centre in order to conceal the chimneys whereas the work was finished with a plane truncated roof with chimney-shafts at the extremities and in the middle".

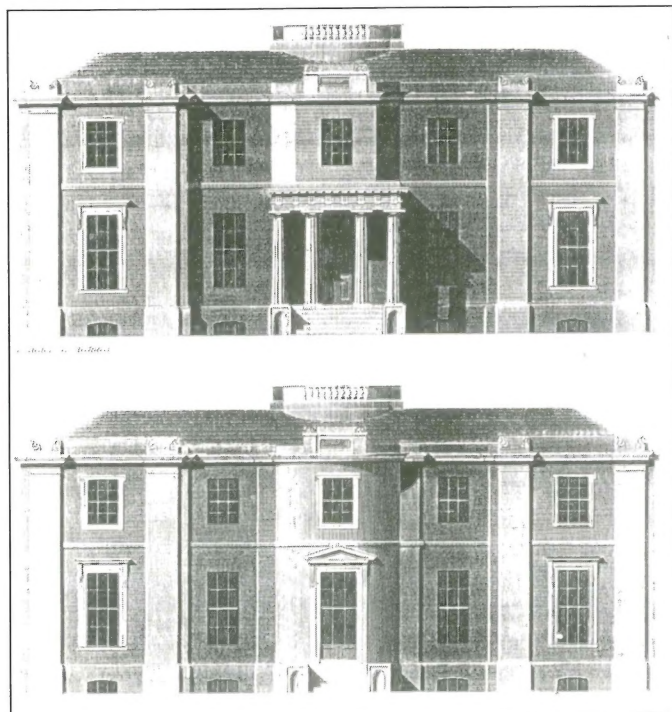
Fulton Alexander. Plates showing the design appear in Nicholson's *Dictionary* published in 1819. Yorkhill House and grounds were purchased by Andrew Gilbert, a Glasgow underwriter in 1813. Mr Gilbert's niece formed a romantic attachment with John Graham 'the eminent artist' who came to paint her portrait and the couple were married in 1834. When the niece eventually succeeded to the estate, a condition was that her husband should adopt the name Gilbert. John Graham-Gilbert became a famous painter and died at Yorkhill House in 1866. Mrs. Graham-Gilbert died in 1877 and bequeathed her husband's paintings to the city while the house passed to her nephew and nieces. The house was demolished in 1909 to make way for the building

of the Sick Children's Hospital.

On 27th August 1804, Nicholson married Jane Jamieson in Anderston Church. Miss Jamieson came from a well-to-do family with extensive property in the North of England. Her brother had a thriving drapers business in Gateshead.

'Nicolson Peter Nicolson, Architect in Glasgow & Jean Jamieson, Residenter in Tradestown. Married 27th August by Mr. James Stewart, Relief Minister in Anderston' [Entry in *Glasgow (City) Parish Register*. 1804] (The minister who married them was reputed to be an illegitimate son of Bonnie Prince Charlie, according to James Cowan in *From Glasgow's Treasure Chest*.)

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Nicholson's marriage occasioned yet another change of address.

'Nicholson, Peter, architect,  
611 Argyll street' [*Glasgow  
Directory*, 1804]

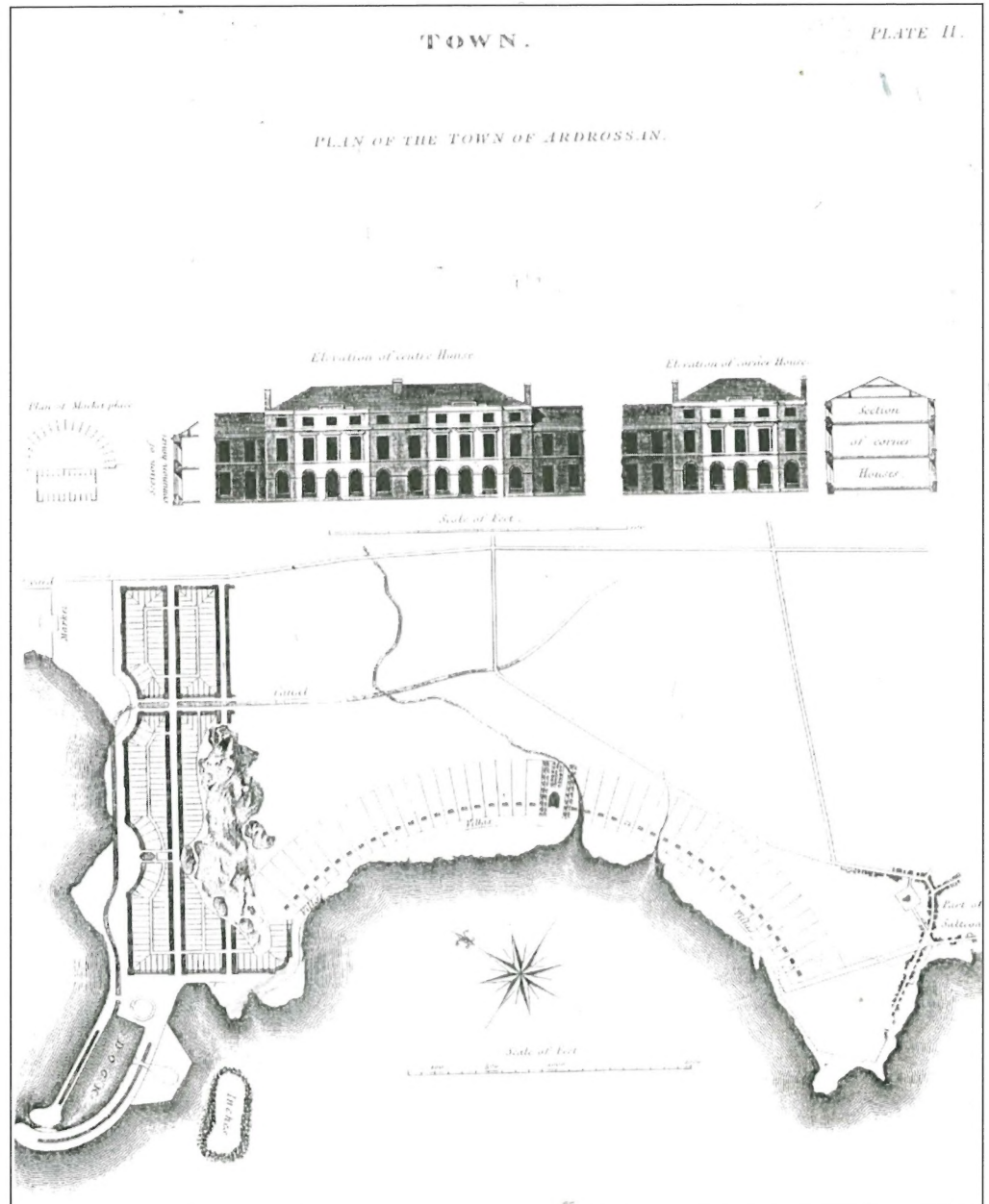
Nicholson's association with the Philosophical Society continued and on 19th December 1804 he read his 'Essay on the Properties of the Lever' before his colleagues, which was subsequently published in the *Philosophical Magazine*. He became a director of the society in 1805.

'Nicholson, Peter, architect,  
604 Argyll street' [*Glasgow  
Directory*, 1805]

Apart from the houses at Carlton Place, Nicholson's major project while in Glasgow was to draw up the plans for the town of Ardrossan. The 12th Earl of Eglinton had ambitious ideas for a seaside town with a harbour to be connected to Glasgow by a canal. In 1806, Thomas Telford was engaged to supervise the construction of the harbour with Nicholson drawing the town plan.

'The Eglinton Arms Hotel, 1806-7, Peter Nicholson, was the main inn for Eglinton's new town. It is a striking symmetrically faced block of painted ashlar.... Glasgow Street, 1806 onwards, Peter Nicholson. ...30-56, 66-72 and 86-98 are original houses, part of the original Eglinton / Nicholson plan' [From *Ayrshire and Arran: an Illustrated Architectural Guide* by Rob. Close].

'Nicholson, Peter, architect,  
13, Brunswick-Place' [*Glasgow  
P.O. Directory*, 1806]



By now, the records of the Philosophical Society indicate that he was more than a year in arrears with his subscription and his membership was terminated.

'Nicholson, Peter, architect,  
Sauchy-hall road' [*Glasgow  
Directory*, 1807]

As well as his architectural and building work, Nicholson was also engaged as a teacher. David Napier recorded that he received lessons in drawing and mathematics from Nicholson and that Joseph Clement the engineer was also a pupil of his in Glasgow.

'While working in Glasgow as a turner, he [Joseph Clement] took lessons in drawing from Peter

Above: Town plan for Ardrossan, from Nicholson's *Architectural Dictionary*.

Nicholson, the well-known writer on carpentry - a highly ingenious man. Nicholson happened to call at the shop at which Clement worked in order to make a drawing of a power-loom; and Clement's expressions of admiration at his expertise were so enthusiastic, that Nicholson, pleased with the youth's praise, asked if he could be of service to him in any way. Emboldened by the offer, Clement requested, as the greatest favour he could confer upon him, to have the loan of the drawing he had just made, in order

that he might copy it. The request was at once complied with; and Clement, though very poor at the time, and scarcely able to buy candle for the long winter evenings, sat up late every night until he had finished it. Though the first drawing he had ever made, he handed it back to Nicholson instead of the original, and at first the draughtsman did not recognise that the drawing was not his own. When Clement told him that it was only the copy, Nicholson's brief but emphatic praise was -

*Continued on Page 12*



# Of comical owls and conical roofs

MARK BAINES's diary of this year's annual weekend architectural city visit. This, the third such event to celebrate the date of Thomson's birth, was to the city of Leeds.

**M**Y LONG-STANDING memory of Leeds has always been of the blackened, brooding presence of the city's Town Hall, the massive, colonnaded proportions of which resonated with the robust character of both the city, and also, as I liked to imagine, that of its architect, the wonderfully named Cuthbert Brodrick. The building's dark magnificence seemed to encapsulate the nineteenth century ambition of this once industrially burgeoning and entrepreneurially confident northern city. Returning some twenty years later, Brodrick's masterpiece, now cleaned, appeared as impressive as ever, and despite other intrusions on the skyline it remains the dominant architectural landmark currently presiding over the economic resurgence of the city.

Two days are hardly enough to do justice to any city, though in this instance the exhaustive pursuit of an ambitiously packed itinerary did at times seem to challenge this supposition. For this all credit to Gavin Stamp, his assembled team of expert guides and the stylish Queen's Hotel which comfortably accom-



*Above: Harris's Civic Hall*

modated some serious appetites and many weary limbs.

## Friday 6.30pm

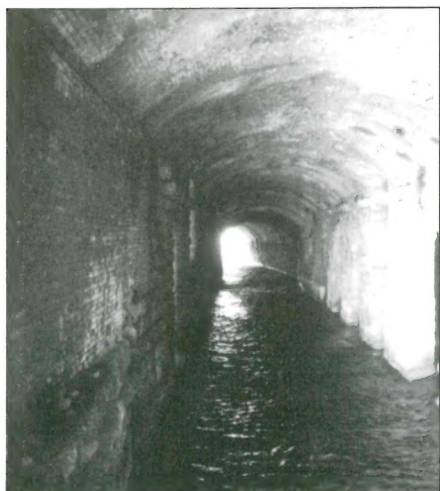
The late arrival of the Glasgow contingent of the Thomson Society at Leeds station meant an immediate and necessarily hurried visit to the Grand Theatre which houses a wonderfully animated and colourful auditorium. As the house lights soon dimmed, a dress rehearsal foreclosed further inspection so the party was forced to retire to Whitelock's, a long narrow public house entered from an equally long, narrow and once medieval yard. As one literally filed inside, a fine, timber-panelled Victorian interior of equally constricted width and extended length was progressively revealed. An intriguingly symmetrical rapport was thus established between the two spaces, as each neatly counterbalanced the other. (At this point, though out of sequence with events, mention must be made of the fine steak pie, the proportions of which virtually defied consumption given the restrictions of the space!) After dinner a small group made a nocturnal foray into

*Below: the Aire channelled through Leeds' city centre railway arches*

the ominously named 'dark arches'. These in fact turned out to be the masonry vaulted spaces below the high level railway. By comparison with the sequence, though greater expanse of equivalent spaces below Glasgow's Central Station the experience was relatively benign, although the presence of flowing water did contribute additional atmosphere.

## Saturday 9.00am

Saturday began in City Square, a not particularly distinguished and relatively amorphous space overlooked by the aforementioned Queen's Hotel, the Victorian Post Office and a largely indifferent array of tall commercial buildings of recent design. Proceeding via two buildings by Alfred Waterhouse, he of Manchester Law Courts fame, we were received by the sedate brick terraces of Park Square, once the heart of the Georgian West End. Here too, and pro-





*Right: Gilbert Scott's Infirmary*

*Middle: Leeds City Varieties auditorium*

*Below: St John's Church*

viding an initial touch of the bizarre stands Thomas Amble's Moorish Gothic extravaganza in terracotta and brick, somewhat reminiscent of Templeton's carpet factory beside Glasgow Green. A former clothing factory it is now inevitably offices.

A short pause to observe Gilbert Scott's Infirmary (1863) was followed by a tour of E. Vincent Harris's Civic Hall (1933),



On this point it seems apposite to make mention of J.D. Crace's late nineteenth century decorative scheme for the great hall in Brodrick's masterpiece, which not

integrity of its exterior. This was a personally disappointing experience.

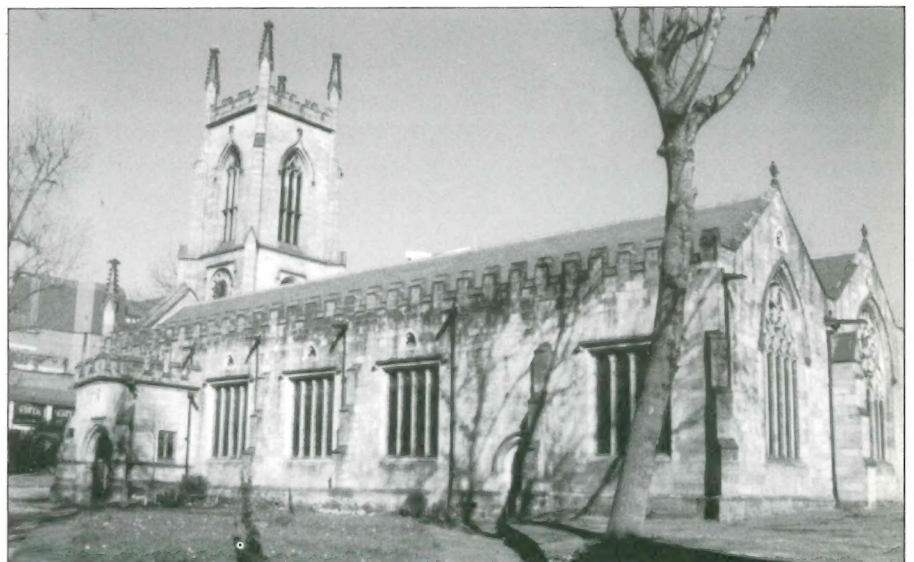
Greatly more satisfying in these respects and more were the following two buildings, the City Varieties Theatre and the Church of St John.



The City Varieties was a compact gem, its relatively anonymous exterior - a simple raised box - ingeniously inserted within the central confines of its urban block. Entered from a yard in a manner not dissimilar to Whitelock's it was small, engagingly intimate and delightfully shabby as it awaits Lottery funding for its hopefully not too pure restoration. We were informed that the suspended brass railed balconies lining the auditorium had precariously played host to staggering audience numbers, amongst them those of the televised 'Good Old Days'. It proudly boasted one of the smallest proscenium arched stages I have ever seen, whilst the bar walls smiled with the photographic memorabilia of entertainers past and present.

an Edwardian neo-classical building as resplendent in white as Brodrick's predecessor was once in black. The twin towers which sit astride the symmetrical entrance facade are each surmounted by gilded owls, almost comical were it not for the fact they are the symbol of Leeds. The return elevations are symmetrically adorned with a pair of enormous bracketed clocks. The exterior was stylishly offset by the interior decor and furnishings of an interesting variety of internal spaces whilst the elegant plan expertly negotiated an extremely difficult site. In these respects at least, although lacking the singular power of its predecessor, it appeared to be an appropriately worthy successor to Brodrick's Town Hall, the various civic functions of which it rehoused.

only trivially undermined the spatial power of this space, but also tragically succeeded in severing it from the monolithic





The seventeenth century church and twin naved interior of St John's was approached across an uneven, grave stoned precinct. Saved by the persuasion of Gilbert Scott, controversially altered and restored by Richard Norman Shaw and later re-altered by Temple Moore, the interior presented a fascinating series of somewhat ad hoc conjunctions of exquisitely detailed elements. Collectively these imparted a number of satisfying, though not necessarily wholly resolved complexities to its otherwise simple, softly lit space.

By contrast the broad, almost square plan of the interior of the cathedral of St. Anne's (1905) came over as relatively banal and lifeless despite the tentative arts and crafts details and the occasionally tantalising art nouveau inclinations which nudge its Romanesque-Gothic arrangement into the early realms of the twentieth century.

A close and relatively new neighbour of both St. Anne's and, more significantly, the Town Hall was Jeremy Dixon's and Ed Jones' Henry Moore Centre, a brave though literally rather shallow piece of contemporary contextual facade design. Sadly a lack of time and an interval in the galleries exhibition schedule precluded a visit to its much-praised interior conver-



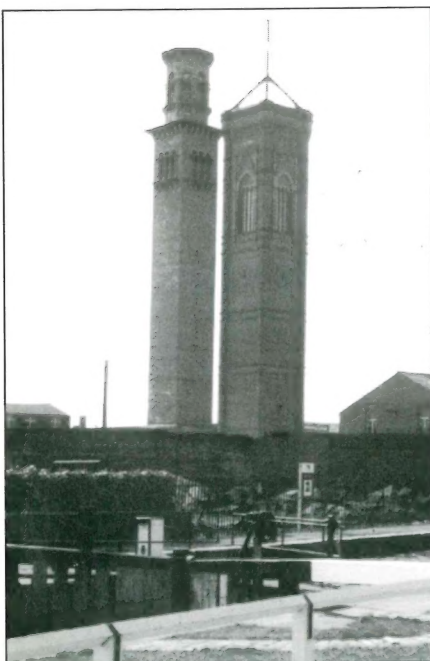
sion of the adjoining terraced buildings. However it was noticeable in passing that its smoothly austere, black marble facade was now undeservedly the target for a varied menu of remnant fast food.

Lunch was followed by a daylight tour of the now not so dark arches en route to the eagerly anticipated visit to site of Marshall's Mills. The river was crossed in full view of three surviving mill chimneys, one relatively plain, another after Giotto's campanile in Florence and the third after a tower in Verona (*left*). After circumnavigating this impressive trio we quickly encountered the depressing urban vacuum which sadly, and as though to some pre-ordained, national aesthetic formula, appears with depressing regularity to chart the economic revitalisation of so many British cities. Unfortunately Leeds is no exception. Coloured metal sheds and insipidly polite, pseudo-Georgian pavilions of shallow, post-modern pretensions share an almost continuous expanse of private parking spaces where the quali-

ty of the public domain is reduced to a perfunctory zero. Doubly rewarding then in this post-industrial desert to find the enigma of an Egyptian temple (*above*) stolidly still standing between an orphaned, red brick public house and a gutted six-storey mill. The academically reconstructed facade aside, this building is one of the most remarkable and innovative monuments of the industrial age, Temple Mill.

Built in 1840 for John Marshall, one of the first industrialist millionaires, it was designed by Ignatius Bonomi and engineered by James Combe whose own description of the building I cannot better:

"The mill described in this communication consists of one room, 396 feet long by 216 feet wide, covering nearly two acres of ground. The roof is formed of brick groined arches 21 feet high by 36 feet span, upon cast iron pillars: an impenetrable covering of





*Above: St Peter's Leeds*

*Middle: The Corn Exchange*

*Below: County Arcade*

coal-tar and lime is laid on a coating of rough plaster over the arches and upon that is a layer of earth 8 inches thick, sown with grass. This immense room is lighted and ventilated by a series of skylights 13 feet 6 inches in diameter; one at the centre of each arch. A vaulted cellar with brick pillars extends under the whole of the building, and contains the shafts for communicating the motion from a pair of engines of 100 horses power, to the machinery in the mill; the flues and steam cases for warming and ventilating; the revolving fan for urging air into the room, with the gas and water pipes, and the remainder of the space is appropriated for warehouses.'

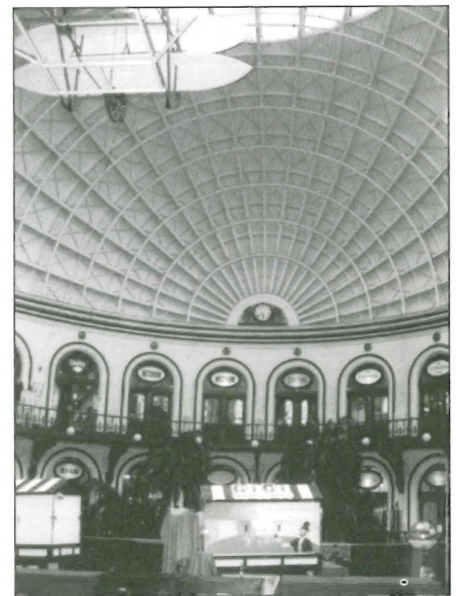
The deep plan of the top-lit, single-storey production floor along combined with the fully integrated, passive environmental control and mechanical servicing is all quite revolutionary and not far short of, and, in many instances, in advance of contemporary practice. If the impact of the spacious, roof-lit interior was breathtaking then moving between the regimented ranks of sixty-six conical rooflights, which resembled a roof top encampment of giant umbrellas, was probably the most surreally memorable highlights of the trip.

The walk continued along the south side of the river which, with the exception of the recently built but overscaled Royal Armouries building, was eerily quiet even when alongside the riverside housing. Further east, the extent of dereliction progressively increased and with it an all-too familiar sense of desolation. Recrossing the river and scrambling uphill over expansive demolition sites we arrived at the church of St Saviour's (1845) where the doctoral robes of Dr. Edward Bouverie Pusey, the Leader of the Oxford Movement and the church's founder, could endearingly still be found on display in the cupboard located in the chapel of his own name. Given the rather dilapidated urban surroundings the spartan interiors of this and the neighbouring church of St Hilda's were quite moving in their simplicity. The larger and obviously



well-endowed church of St Peter at Leeds completed the trinity. Unusually but highly effectively entered on the transverse axis of an impressively long nave, the colourful interior was dramatically offset by the dark stained woodwork of the galleries.

Back in the denser folds of the city centre the survivors of the party were free to explore. The Corn Exchange, another of Brodrick's characteristically bold contributions has monumental affinities with that of a heavily rusticated, but unmistakably Northern colosseum. The oval plan and galleried section now hosts a lively collection of small traders all presided over by the spectacular curved geometries of the exposed timber roof structure, which reminded me, not inappropriately I thought, of an enormous, upturned wicker basket. From here to the boisterous atmosphere of the City Markets, a large, airy and colourful cast iron structure jam-packed with people



and all manner of merchandise. And if this was not impressive enough then there were the arcades of which Leeds boasts five excellent examples. They

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# Peter Nicholson

*Continued from Page 5*

"Young man, you'll do". Proud to have such a pupil, Nicholson generously offered to give him gratuitous lessons in drawing, which were thankfully accepted; and Clement, working at nights with great ardour, soon made rapid progress, and became an expert draughtsman'. [Smiles *Industrial Biography (Iron Workers and Tool Makers)*, 1863]

Nicholson was asked, along with Stark and Hamilton, to submit plans for the building of the Hunterian Museum by the University authorities in 1802. This was to house the collection of Thomas Hunter which was to be moved from London to Glasgow. The College records for 10th December reveal that 'The committee are instructed to take Plans from David



Above:  
Photograph ca.  
1910 of  
Nicholson's Coffee  
House and shops  
at Paisley Cross  
(original in  
Paisley Museum  
ref P8/1155).

Below:  
Transverse section  
of the Coffee  
House, from  
Nicholson's  
Architectural  
Dictionary.

Hamilton and Peter Nicholson, Architects in Glasgow, bargaining for said Plans in the most prudent and economical manner'.

Nicholson submitted his account (£30) for the plans on 28th April 1803. However, his plans were rejected in favour of ones drawn by Stark. Nicholson was employed to supervise the construction and contributed plans for some additional features incorporated into the design. A few years later, his plans for the Hamilton Building 'a large edifice to complete the West Quadrangle' were accepted, although he had by then left the City. This building was erected under the supervision of John Brash.

The Coffee Rooms and attendant buildings which were erected at Paisley Cross were also designed by Nicholson. These buildings were three stories high. The one-pair-of-stairs floor was occupied by the Coffee Room with elaborate interior decoration and adorned externally

with Ionic Pilasters. The basement was used for cellaring while the ground floor was occupied by a series of shops.

Peter Nicholson left Glasgow in 1808. There is no evidence

that he ever returned. He died in Carlisle on 18th June 1844. Four years later his grand-daughter Jane Nicholson married Alexander 'Greek' Thomson.

## Committee

*Chairman:* Gavin Stamp

*Hon. Secretary:* Dominic d'Angelo

*Hon. Treasurer:* Irene Stewart

*Hon. Minutes Secretary:*

Pam Painter

*Committee:* Mark H. Baines,

Michael Davis, David J.

Forrester, Roger Guthrie,

John McAslan, Pippy

McEwen, Dr Sam McKinstry,

Matthew Merrick, Mary

Miers, Graeme Shearer,

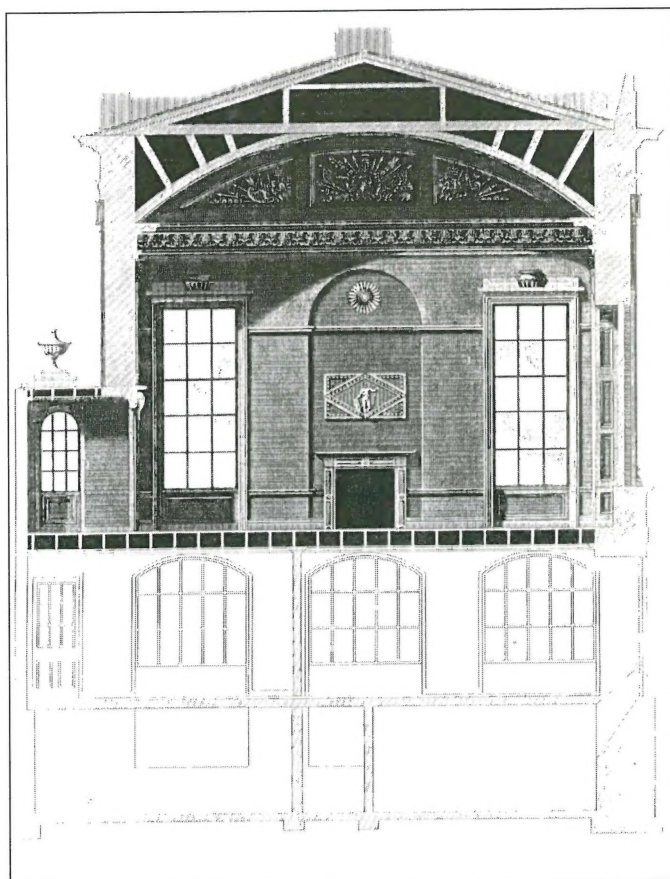
Sandy Stoddart.

Our *Patrons* are The Earl of

Glasgow, Professor Andor

Gomme and Professor

Andrew MacMillan.



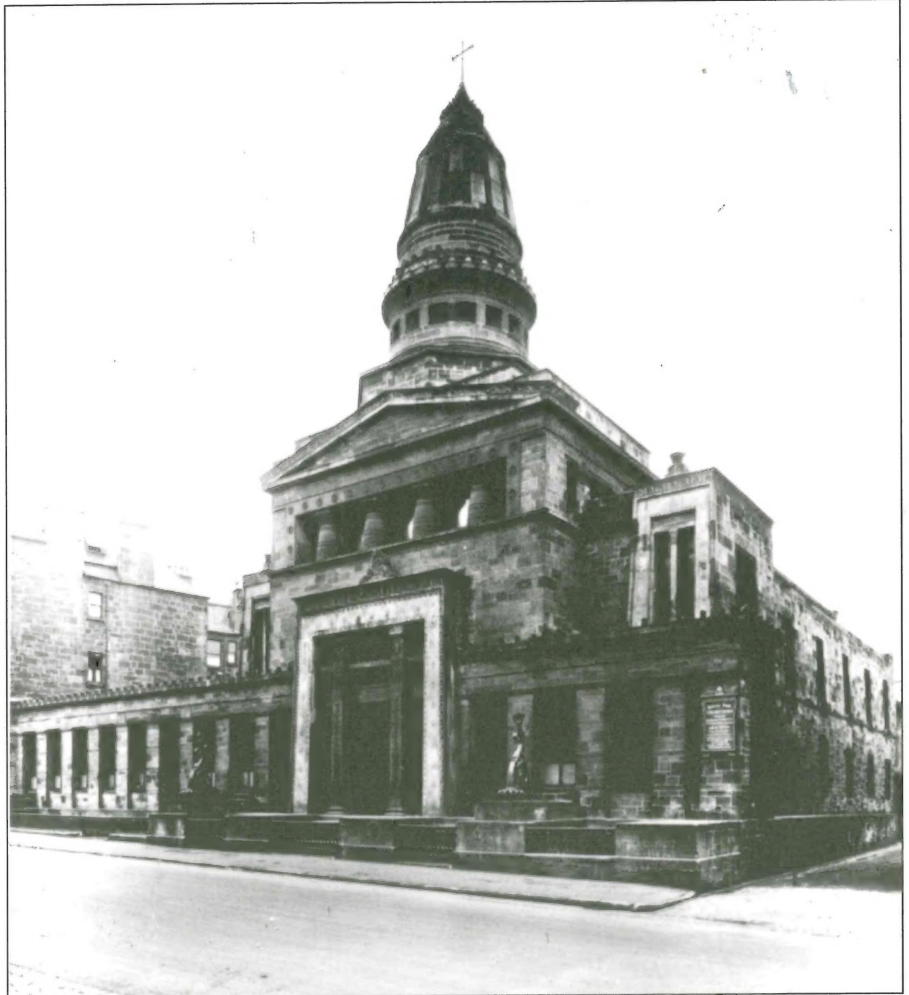


# Queen's Park Church photographs

WE REPRODUCE two more photographs from the late Graham Law's thesis on Thomson. They illustrate the Queen's Park Church and both are prints from negatives by Annan which have since been destroyed.

On the fine view of the exterior a notice board can be seen announcing that the building is 'Queen's Park St George's Church' while the view of the interior, looking towards the liturgical 'west', is a much sharper image than that reproduced in Gomme & Walker's *Architecture of Glasgow*. The decoration can clearly be seen along with the fenestration of partly coloured glass, while the slender iron columns above the upper gallery hardly seem strong enough to carry the stonework of the extraordinary domed steeple above.

*If you have private photographs of street scenes or interiors showing now-demolished Thomson buildings, the Society would be happy to have a copy made at our expense for our files.*





# Leeds Visit

range in scale and proportion from the modest economy of Queen's to the lofty grandiosity of Thornton's but all are crowned by the domed flamboyance of the County. Like sparkingly colourful jewels cut through the depth of the city blocks, their tempered environments are suffused with natural light and ring with the characteristically subdued echo of softly mingled sounds. Interestingly most of them are ramped, revealing the consummate skill of their Victorian architects in the composition and details of the serially repeated, stepped facades of the shops and upper offices under their decorative, glazed roof structures. Consequently, the orderly aesthetic and geometric precision of these arcades furnish the city with an dignified set of urban spaces which co-exist in elegant counterpoint to the provincially rich architectural diversity of the busy streets which surround them.

It is now hard to believe that all this was achieved in one day!

## Sunday 10.00am

Sunday was devoted to visiting Saltaire, the model industrial village founded in the middle of the nineteenth century by the wealthy Bradford mill owner, Sir Titus Salt and subsequently built to the designs of his appointed architects, Lockwood and Mawson. In all some nine hundred modest terraced houses were laid out on an orthogonal gridiron plan the geometry of which extended up the northern slope above the Leeds to Liverpool canal and included a People's Institute, a school, a hospital and a row of almshouses arranged around a planted public square. Similarly aligned, though on the opposite side of the railway line stand the church and, of course, the mill. A principal north-south street bisecting the town plan connects each of the principal buildings with the now somewhat neglected green expanse of Robert's Park beyond. Originally laid out by Salt for the benefit of the populace there is a statue in its midst commemorating the achievements of not only the altruistic entrepreneur but also those of the woolly llamas which helped build his fortune.

The mill, engineered by William Fairburn is a magnificent stone structure recently revitalised by the enterprising Jonathan Silver. The converted building

now contains shops, a cafe and a number of fabulous David Hockney collections distributed on various floors within the cast iron framed interior. The restoration is expertly and imaginatively executed whilst the quality of its contents immediately self-evident. The top floor is as yet unrestored as its owner awaits inspiration as to an appropriate use which would allow the impressive length of this continuous, top lit space and its delicate wrought iron roof structure to remain unimpaired through subdivision.

Opposite the mill the church stands alone, a graciously proportioned stone casket eloquently mirroring the restrained opulence of the segmentally vaulted interior. In this instance the sensitive decorative colour scheme fully complemented the exterior.

And so to home, first through the spectacular Pennine scenery as viewed from the privileged mobile vantage point afforded by the Settle to Carlisle train and then to Glasgow thus ending a most stimulating and rewarding two days.

### Dublin next year, anyone?

Thanks are due to the many owners, managers and incumbents of buildings including the Civic Hall, Town Hall, City Varieties, Grand Theatre, Marshall's Mill, the Churches of St John, St Peter, St Saviour (from where Sam McKinstry was ignominiously obliged to make a forced exit after having been locked inside!), St Hilda and the Church and Mill at Saltaire for allowing us to visit. Also to Chris Hammond for help with the arrangements.

## CASES

*Continued from Page 3*

sonable proposition. More to the point, if the choice – absurdly – seemed to be between no cleaning and no building (for unless work proceeds soon, Egyptian Halls is unlikely to survive), there could be no doubt about what should be done, so we were happy to accept stone cleaning – provided it is achieved by the safest and gentlest possible methods, with Historic Scotland's approval.

We understand that agreement has now been reached in this matter.

# Cairness in October?

MARY MIERS is organising a visit to Aberdeenshire on the weekend of 18th/19th October.

The plan is to leave Glasgow by the 0725 train on Saturday, 18th, arriving in Aberdeen around 1010, travelling to Cairness House for a visit and picnic lunch, an afternoon visit to an Archibald Simpson house currently being restored by its owners, followed by a journey to Banff (possibly via Pennan) for an overnight at the Banff Springs Hotel (£24 b&b per person, or £40 dinner plus b&b in the hotel's Moray Lounge).

On Sunday 19th October, there will be an opportunity to visit Banff as well as Duff House, with a number of possible visits in the area in the afternoon before returning to Glasgow on the 1932 train from Aberdeen.

Mary welcomes suggestions for places to visit on the 19th, but needs to be able to confirm room bookings as soon as possible. If you wish to join the group, please call her on 0141 248 3398 by **Friday, 19th September**. Depending on numbers, travelling north by car might be a feasible alternative to train travel and minibus hire.

A one day visit to Carlisle is planned later in the year.

## The Newsletter

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of the *Newsletter* are available, price 50p each plus 2 second class stamps, from the Hon. Secretary at the Society's address.